



Voices of Children and Adolescents in Military Families: Research and Clinical Perspectives on Adjustment and Well-being.

Eric M. Flake MD
Chief, Developmental Pediatrics
Keesler Medical Center
Eric.Flake@us.af.mil

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Speaker: Eric M. Flake

The views expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and do not reflect the official policy of the Department of the Air Force, the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government."

Objectives

- Describe responses that youth serving professionals might anticipate in children exposed to deployment stresses.
- Discuss recent studies indicating that the military child (and families) are experiencing cumulative stresses that impacts function.
- Describe developmentally appropriate resources that are available to support military children and how to find them.
- Explain how communities can work collaboratively to provide support for military children during wartime.

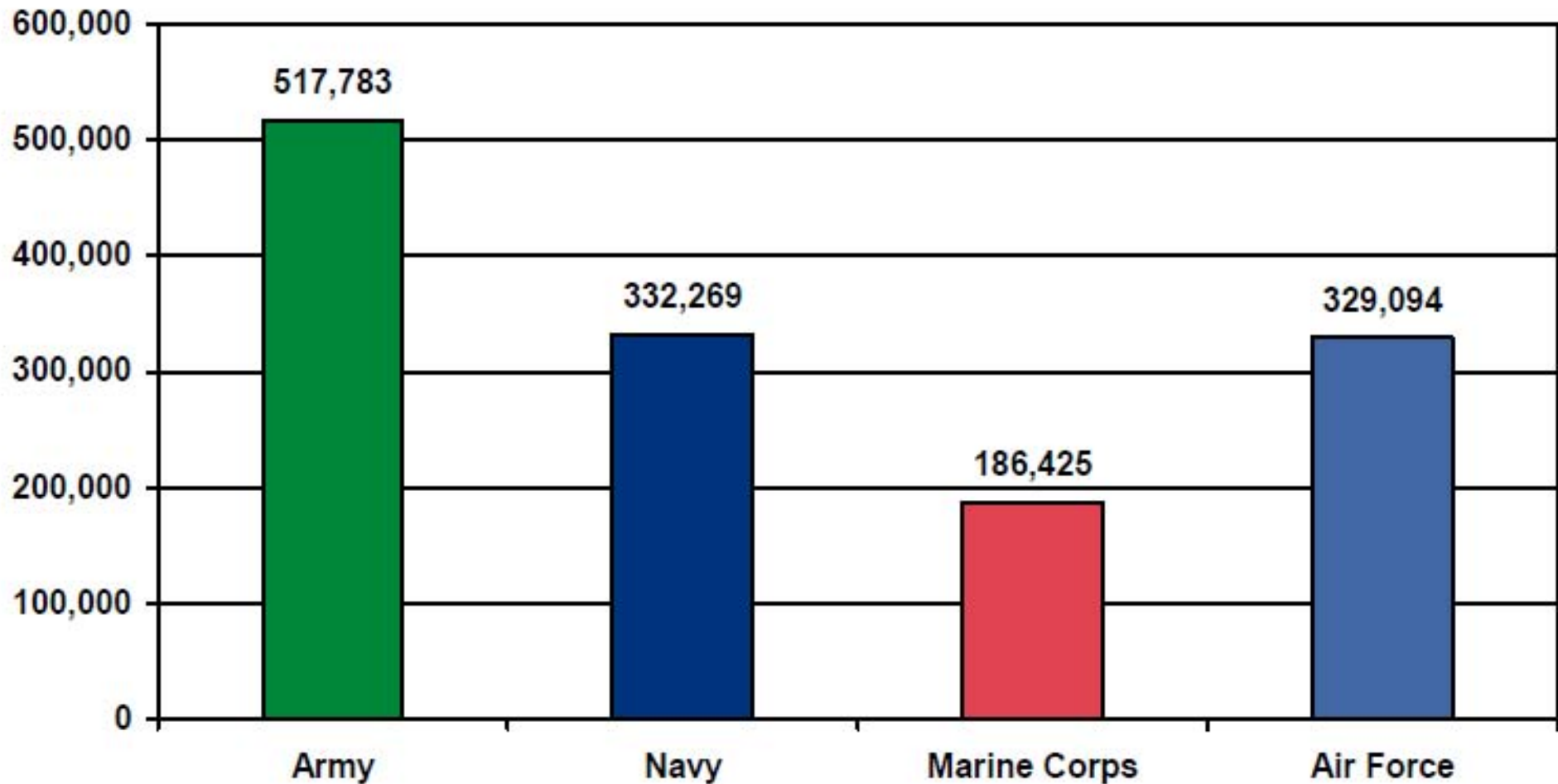
For the first time in history, the number of military dependents (spouses and children) outnumbered the military force. (Active Duty and Reserve)

Demographics of Military Families

- Over one-third (38%) of Active Duty members are married with children.
- Almost two-thirds (58%) of Active Duty members have family responsibilities.

2007 Demographics Profile of the Military Community

Active Duty Demographics

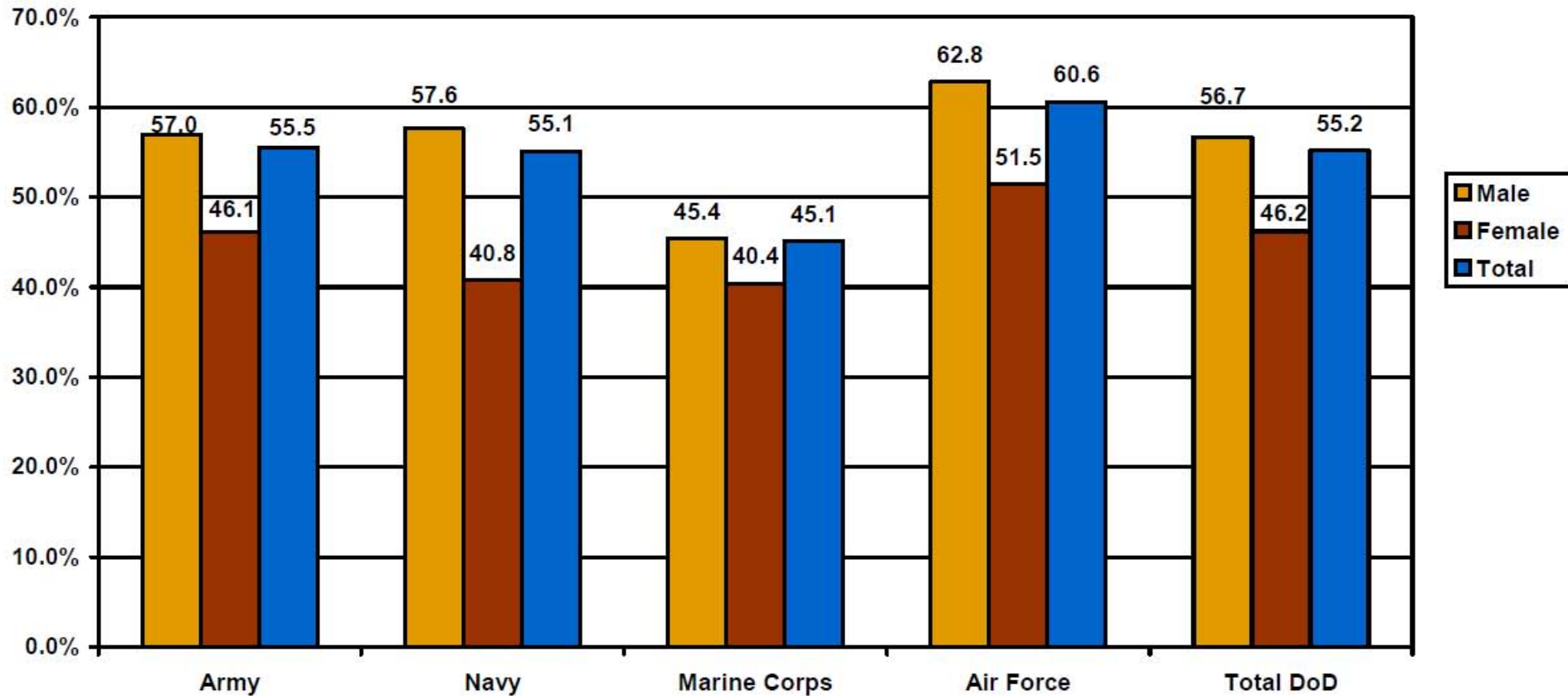


DMDC Active Duty Master File (September 2007)

Who are Military Service Members?

Demographic Variable	Active Duty	Reserve and Guard (Selected Reserve)
Members		
Total Number	1,412,133	859,406
% Women	14.9%	17.3%
% Minorities	36.0%	30.6%
% Located in US	84.4%	99.2%
% 25 years old or younger	47.4%	30.8%
% Married	52.9%	51.5%
% Dual military marriages	6.8%	2.5%

Married Military Members



DMDC Active Duty Master File (September 2007)

All States have Military Members

States with greatest numbers of military personnel

- California
- Virginia
- Texas
- North Carolina
- Georgia

States with greatest numbers of military reservists

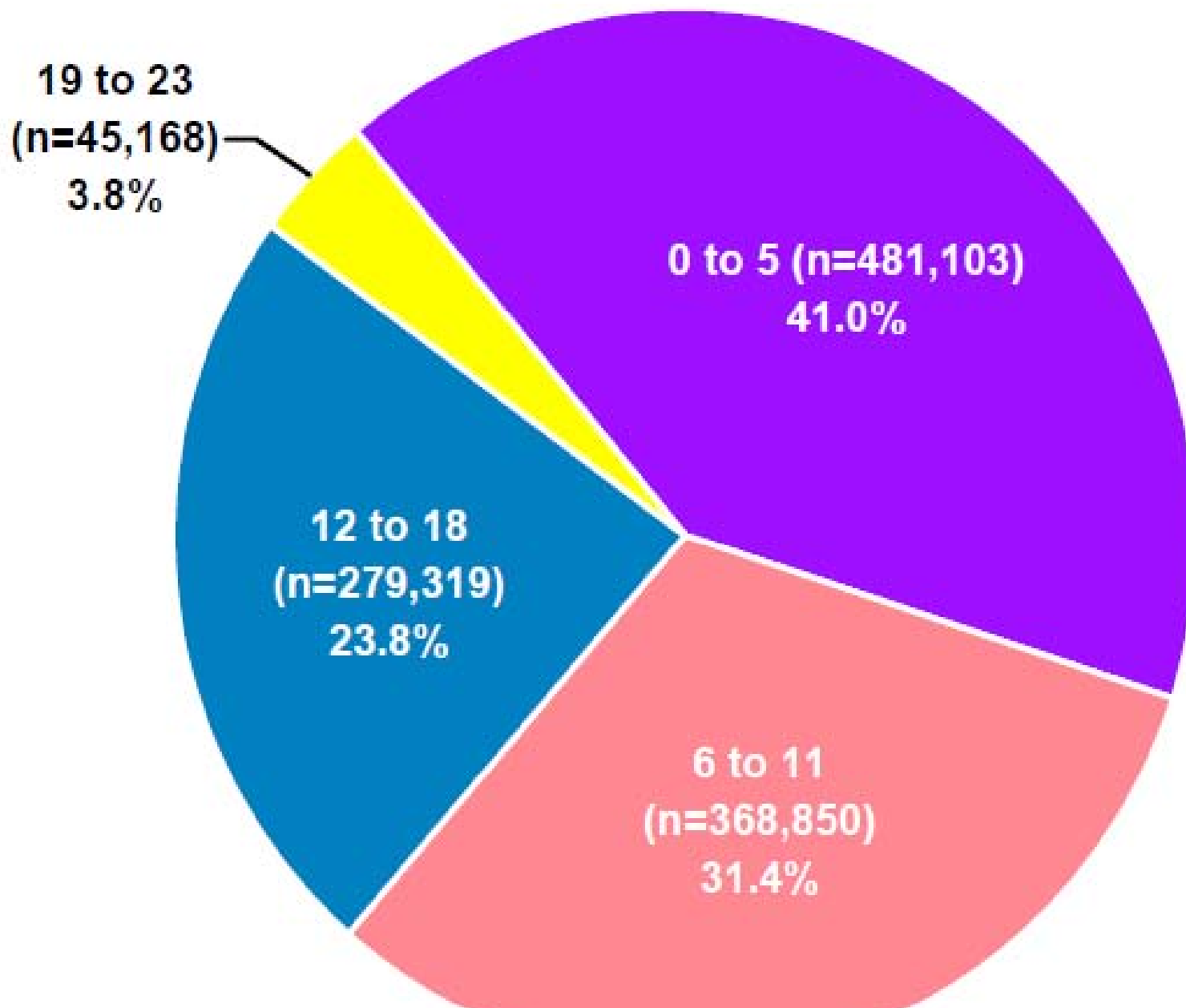
- California
- Texas
- Pennsylvania
- New York
- Florida



Who are Military Families?

Adapted from DoD Demographics Report

Demographic Variable	Active Duty	Reserve and Guard (Selected Reserve)
Families		
Number of Family Members	1,895,310	1,159,195
Number of Spouses	688,418	428,363
% with Children	42%	42%
Average age at birth of 1st child	24.8	27.2
% of Children age 0-5	39%	25%
% Single Parents	5.8%	8.2%



Ages of Military Children

Military Youth Culture

- Military youth serve and sacrifice along with their military parent.
- Military youth's experience differs per child.
- *Their service and sacrifice is an imposed condition made by a parent's work preference.*

Strengths of Military Environment

- Cohesive community environment
- Camaraderie created through shared experiences
- Sense of duty and mission
- Emphasis on education
- Multiple resources available for the military population
- Job Security
- **“Military Benefits”**
 - Universal healthcare, Disneyworld, Tax benefits, Commissary, etc.

Challenges in the Military Environment

- Increase Sense of Danger
- Not if but when do I deploy
- **Balancing “Duty First” and the family**
- 24/7 military employment
- Stigma that vulnerabilities (esp. mental illness) will impact ones career
- Frequency of moves
- Separation from family/friends
- Relocation/starting over issues
 - Unique school challenges
 - Local community integration



Deployment's Impact

- The Global War on Terror (2001) has resulted in ~ 1 million US parents to deploy.
- 2 million US children are directly impacted by these recent deployments.

Deployments are a way of life in the military.



How do you make it a stepping stone and not a stumbling block?

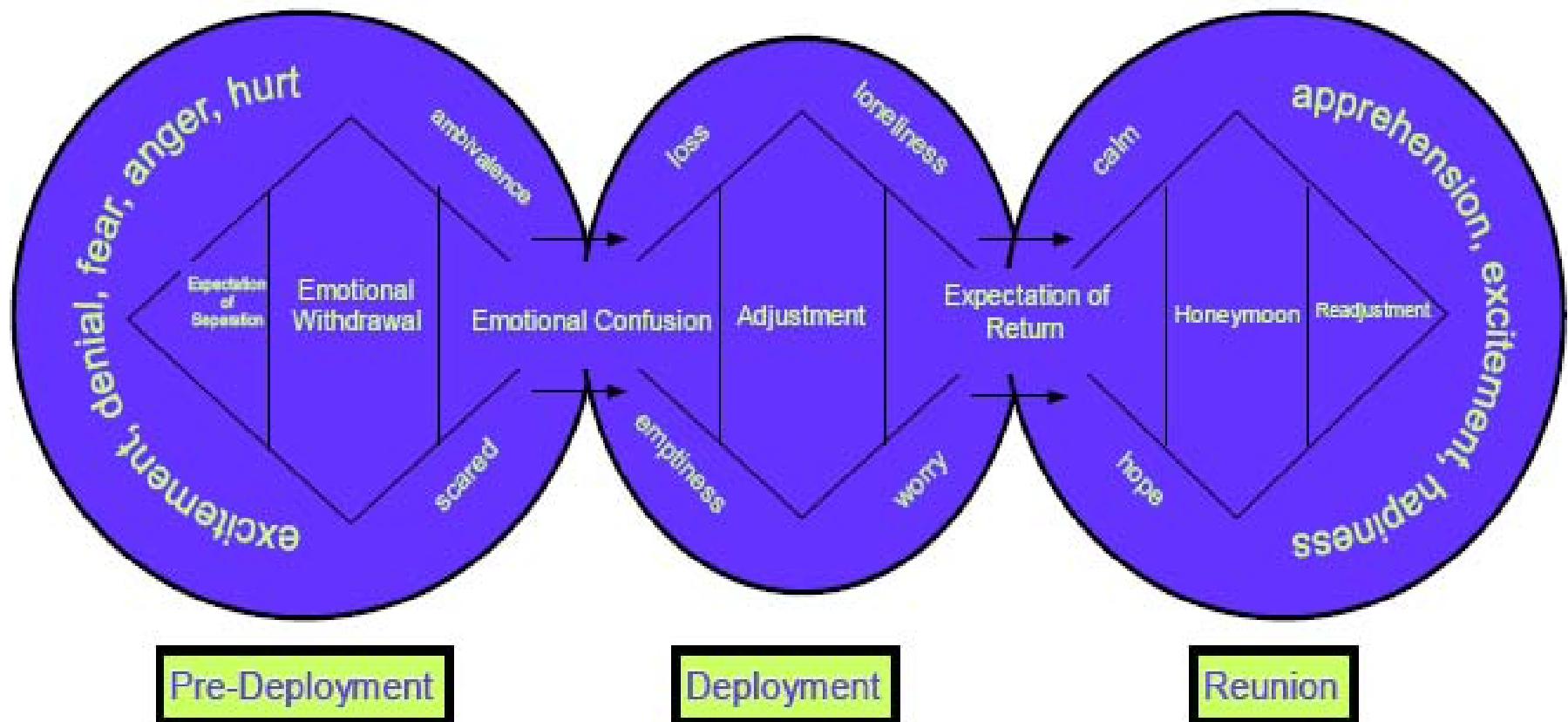
Military Family Separation

- Traditionally military families cope well with temporary separations.
- Increase in families relocating during a deployment.

Military Family Separation

- Wartime deployment adds new dimension to family separation stress.
- Families of activated Reservists and the National Guard may have different needs.

Emotional Stages of the Deployment Cycle



Possible Responses in Youth Struggling with Parents being Deployed

- Sadness
- Anger
- Withdrawal
- Sleep disturbance
- Excessive worry
- Aggressiveness
- Insecurity
- Somatization
- Irritability
- Spectrum – the usual developmentally expected responses to stress
- **No significant change**



Historically who is more vulnerable to the effects of deployment?

- Boys and younger children
- Children affected by maternal depression.
- Young parents
- Lower socioeconomic status



0-5 deployment



Deployment and Family Stress

- 1 in 3 families with a deployed service member identify a school aged child at risk for psychosocial morbidity.
 - Frequency is twice national normative levels.
- High parenting stress levels are double established normative data during deployment.

Youth Self Report (11-16 years old)

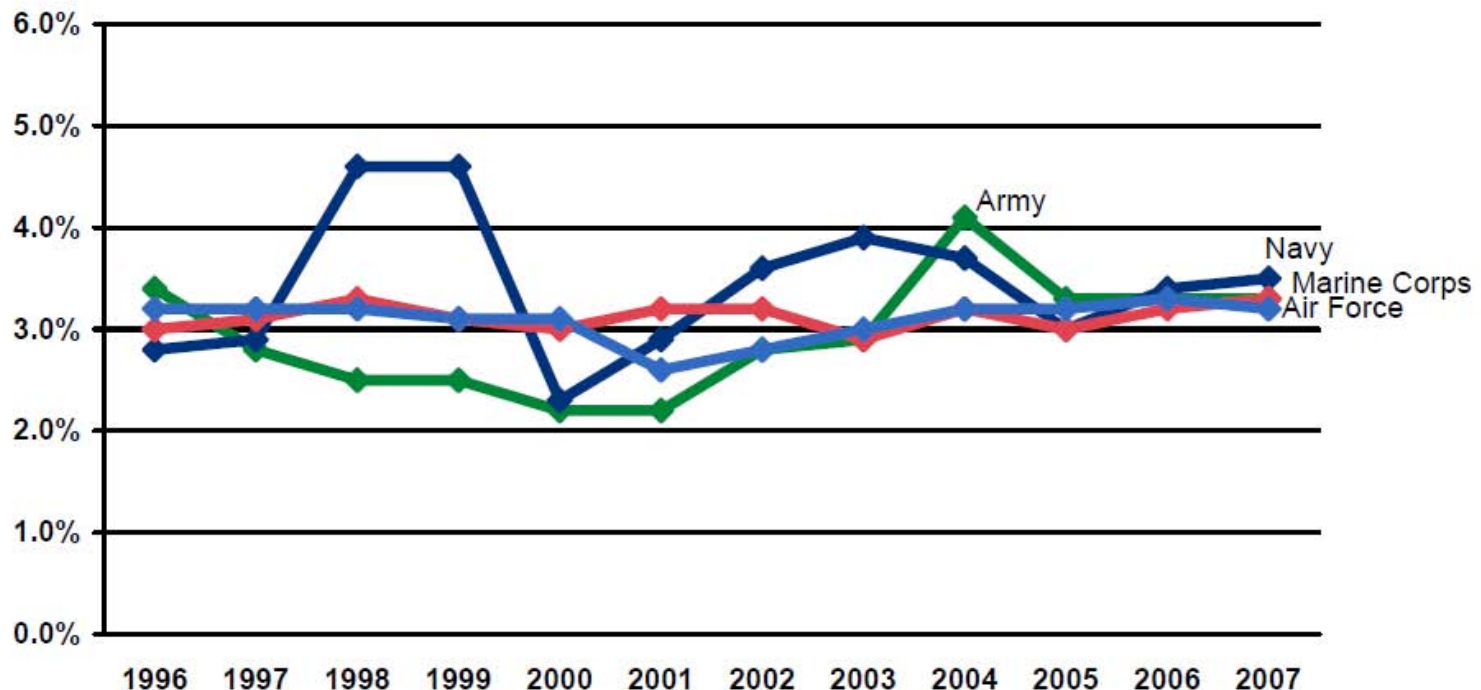
- “At High Risk” Pediatric Symptom Checklist scores (>28):
 - 22% with a deployed parent
 - 8% with a non-deployed parent
- Internalizing, Externalizing, and School Subscales of PSC were **higher** in group with a currently deployed parent ($p < 0.01$)



Divorce Rates

2.53. Estimated Percent of Divorces by Service Branch Trends: 1996-2007

This graph presents the estimated percent of married Active Duty who divorced during Fiscal Years 1996-2007.



Note: These figures include widowed cases. However, the number of people who were widowed last year is expected to be small and should not affect the percents.

Resilient Families

- Reports high levels of cohesion and resilience in military families despite stressors.

(Air Force Community Assessment , 2006)

- 71% of Military Families with children plan to stay in the military until retirement.

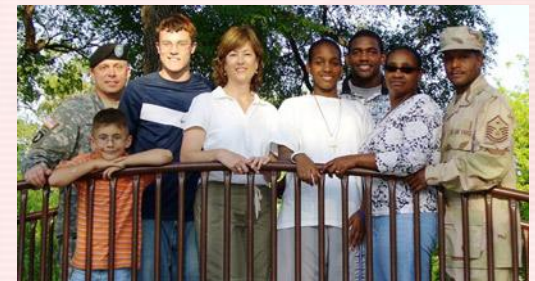
(Active Duty Spouse Survey, 2006)

Supports for the Military Family

- Family Readiness Groups
- Military School Liaison Officers
- Free or Low Cost Child Care Programs
- Integrated Resource Teams
- Youth Outreach Programs
- Military Family Life Consultants

Three Video Intervention Package(s) Available

- 3-5 year olds (preschool)
"Talk, Listen, Connect"
- 6 to 11 year olds (child)
*"Mr. Po and Friends Discuss...
Family Reunion After Deployment"*
- 12 to 18 year olds (teen)
*"Military Youth Coping with
Separation:
When Family Members Deploy"*



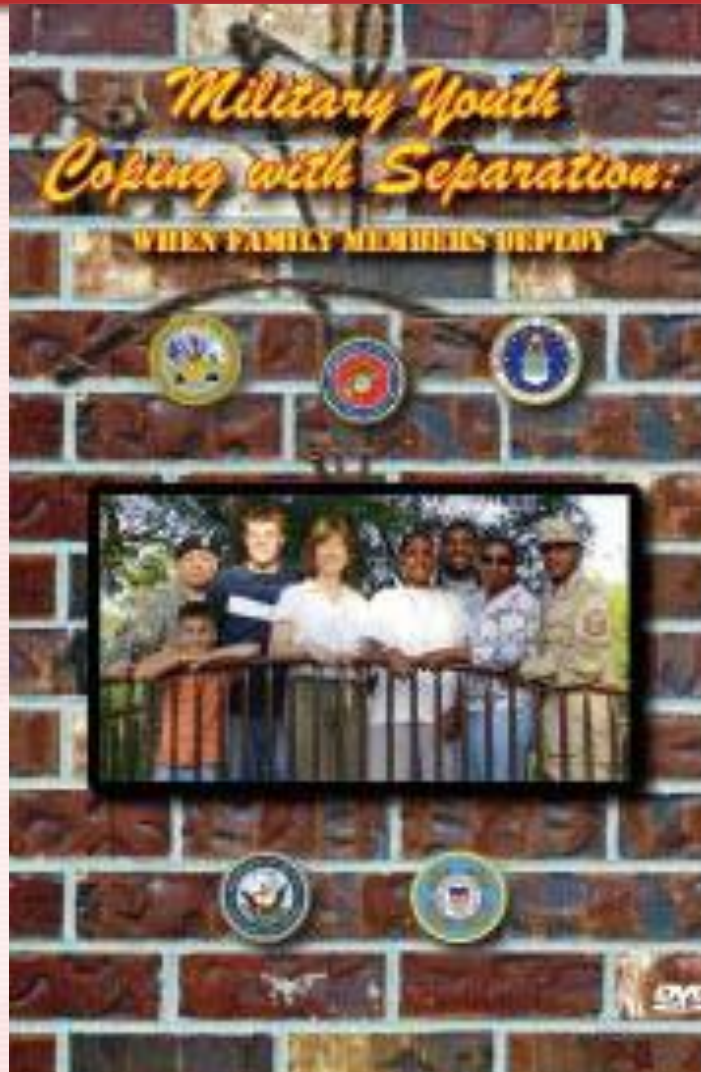


Military Youth Coping with Separation: When Family Members Deploy

Video Concepts and Objectives

- Sensitize the community to military adolescent culture and support needs.
- Candid interviews occurring at camp purple which capture the true feelings and coping strategies of military youth.
- The video accentuates the resiliency of military children and recognizes their service and sacrifice to the Nation.
- Special bonus sections
 - **Facilitator's guide**
 - A military youth stress management plan is included in the DVD.
 - Discussion from professional regarding the challenges and successes of caring for military children.
- Help teens learn what to expect when family member deploys and develop skills to get through deployment successfully.

Video Clip



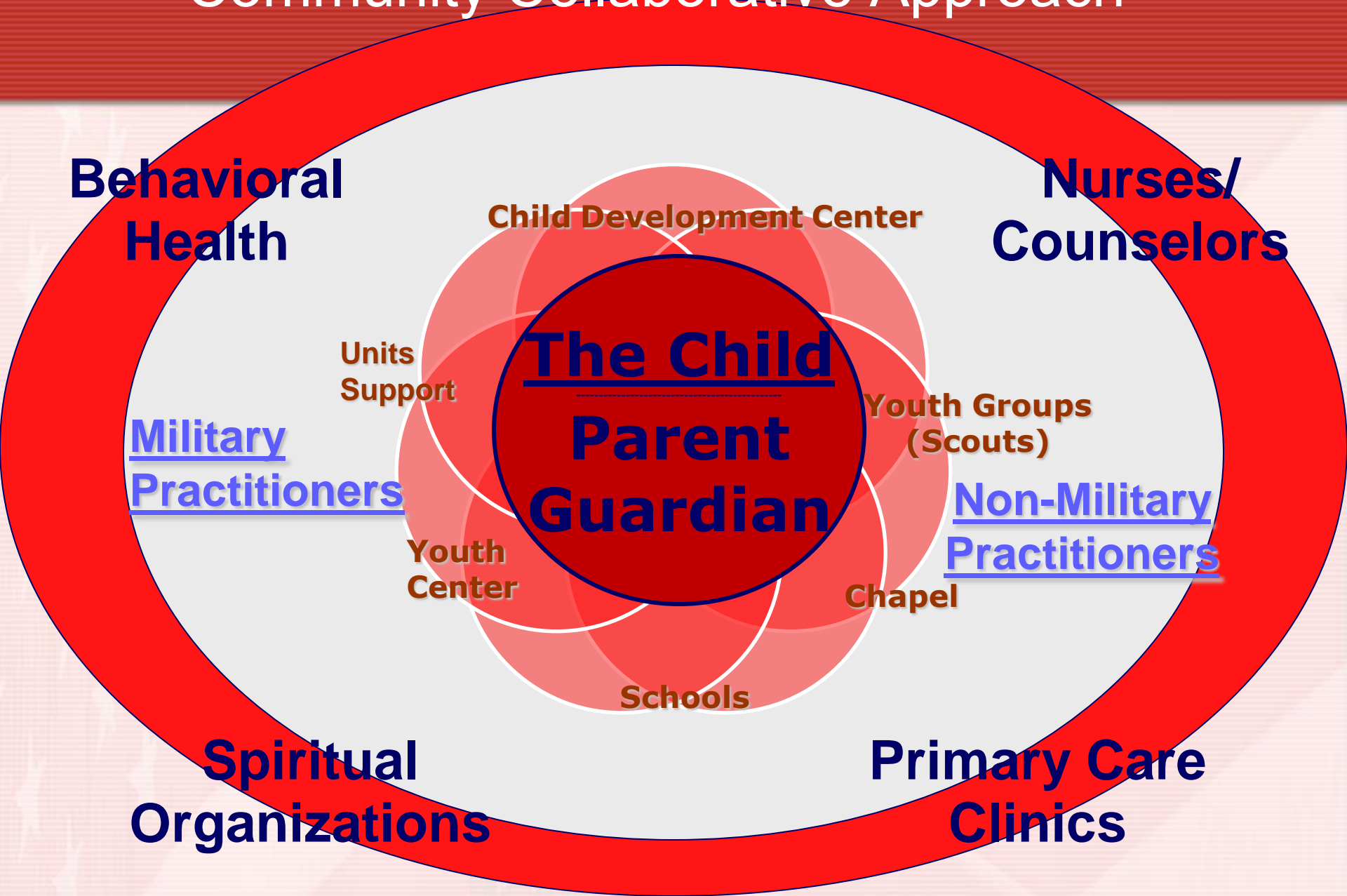
What do you say to children whose parents are deployed, injured or killed?

- Let them know that you appreciate and value **their family member's service and sacrifice.**
- Let them know you appreciate and value their personal service and sacrifice.
- Let them know that asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.
- Listen and be prepared to connect them to community resources.

Military Families and Civilian Systems of Care

- Military Families appreciate community support.
- Military has great resources but not all service member families live in close proximity to military specific resources.
- For some military families there is less stigma associated with community support.

Community Collaborative Approach



Health Care Provider's Duty

- Screen:
 - Ask about deployment related stress.
- Support
 - All families should be offered resources.
- Refer
 - Local and national supports are available.

Important Web Resources

- **Military One Source**
- **Zero To Three – Coming Together Around Military Families**
- **NMFA - National Military Family Association –Operation Purple Camps**
- **Military HOMEFRONT**

One Source for Support

- www.militaryonesource.com

Thank you for Supporting Military Families!



Acknowledgments:

Brave military children and spouses who support their service member during deployment